

**MINUTES
of the
FOURTH MEETING
of the
MILITARY AND VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

**October 3, 2012
Northern New Mexico College
Española, NM**

The fourth meeting of the Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee (MVAC) for the 2012 interim was called to order by Representative Thomas A. Garcia, co-chair, on Wednesday, October 3, at 9:01 a.m. in Room 101 of the Montoya Administration Building of Northern New Mexico College (NNMC) in Española, New Mexico.

Present

Rep. Thomas A. Garcia, Co-Chair
Sen. David Ulibarri, Co-Chair
Rep. Eliseo Lee Alcon
Rep. Dianne Miller Hamilton
Sen. Richard C. Martinez
Sen. John Pinto
Rep. Bob Wooley

Absent

Advisory Members

Rep. Thomas A. Anderson
Sen. William F. Burt
Sen. Carlos R. Cisneros
Rep. George Dodge, Jr.
Rep. Rodolpho "Rudy" S. Martinez
Rep. Edward C. Sandoval

Sen. Mary Jane M. Garcia
Sen. Eric G. Griego
Sen. Clinton D. Harden, Jr.
Sen. Timothy M. Keller
Sen. William H. Payne

Guest Legislator

Rep. Debbie A. Rodella

Staff

Pam Stokes, Legislative Council Service (LCS)
Douglas Carver, LCS
Rebecca Griego, LCS

Guests and Handouts

The guest file and copies of all handouts and written testimony are in the meeting file.

Wednesday, October 3

Welcome and Introductions

Representative Garcia opened the meeting by extending a welcome to the committee, staff and members of the public present. He asked all committee members and staff to introduce themselves. After introductions, Representative Garcia turned the chair of the committee over to Senator Martinez, as the committee was meeting in Senator Martinez's district.

Welcoming Remarks

Alice Lucero, mayor, City of Española, welcomed the members of the committee to the area. She noted that the Española Valley and Northern New Mexico are home to many veterans. She told the members of the committee about the war memorial in Española. She noted that the local Veterans of Foreign Wars post had been promised a 90 mm cannon after World War II, yet now that the city would like to have the cannon for its memorial, the cannon it was promised could no longer be found. Mayor Lucero gave members of the committee a letter that she wrote to the United States Army Center for Military History requesting a cannon for the city's memorial, and she asked the committee for its support in Española's quest for a cannon.

Motion 1

Senator Martinez made a motion, seconded by Senator Ulibarri, requesting that the committee send a letter to the United States Army Center for Military History to support the mayor and the Española City Council in their efforts to get a cannon for the war memorial. The motion passed with all members present voting in favor. Representative Garcia requested that Senator Martinez sign the letter in addition to the chairs of the committee as the war memorial is in his district.

Dr. Nancy "Rusty" Barceló, president, NNMC, welcomed the members of the committee to NNMC. She told the committee that the college is committed to seeing that veterans earn competitive degrees and that veterans are incorporated into the college's new outreach, advising and teaching strategy. She noted that the El Rito Campus of NNMC has many veterans enrolled. Michael P. Branch, president of the NNMC Board of Regents, also welcomed the committee, along with Alfred J. Herrera, a board member.

Veteran Services at NNMC — Ensuring Access and Retention

Pam Montrose, veterans affairs administrator, NNMC; Dr. Matthew Martinez, director, Northern Pueblos Institute, NNMC; and Dr. James Biggs, director of the faculty of environmental science and coordinator for the Green Jobs for Veterans Academy, discussed the services provided to veterans by NNMC. Ms. Montrose discussed the number of people using veterans' benefits at NNMC; this can include both veterans and family members of veterans, depending on the type of veteran education benefit. Currently, there are 57 students using veterans' benefits, but an increase in coming years is anticipated. Ms. Montrose then discussed the five different types of GI bills administered by NNMC and the number of students using each: Chapter 33 benefits, for post 9/11 veterans; the older Chapter 30 benefits; the Veterans Retraining Assistance program; Chapter 35 benefits for dependents; and Chapter 31 benefits for

disabled veterans. She noted that nursing, radiology and engineering are the most popular majors for those using veterans' benefits.

Dr. Biggs told the committee about the Green Jobs for Veterans Academy program, founded 18 months earlier after a six-month discussion. The program offers certificates, associate degrees in applied science and bachelor of science degrees in areas such as renewable energy, environmental science, wildland fire, renewable energy, forestry and environmental monitoring. Dr. Biggs stated that the biggest challenge with the program is retention of interested veterans. The initial plan was to have students enter the program in cohorts of 10, but in the last 18 months, of the 25 to 30 potential students for the program, 90 percent have chosen not to participate, usually because of financial reasons, family issues or medical problems.

Dr. Martinez discussed the American Indian students at NNMC. His presentation was outlined in a PowerPoint document that was presented to the committee. He noted that NNMC's mission included being a Hispanic and indigenous serving institution. He discussed the proportion of Native American students at NNMC, which was 10 percent in the autumn of 2012, with Native American students graduating at a rate slightly higher than their enrollment proportion. The top majors for Native American students are business administration, education and nursing. Dr. Martinez also discussed the American Indian Center at NNMC, the Office of American Indian Affairs at NNMC and the Pueblo Indian Studies program. He also discussed the extension of the use of dual credit courses in partnership with area school districts and ongoing initiatives such as the campus' American Indian Student Organization, the upcoming Historias de Nuevo Mexico conference, lectures and film series and collaborations with state colleges, tribal colleges and community-based organizations.

Members of the committee asked the panel for more details about outreach and recruitment, benefits for disabled veterans and their dependents, the dual credit program and the NNMC film program.

Military and Veterans' Programs at New Mexico State University (NMSU)

Laura Grant, veterans programs coordinator, NMSU; Jacobo Varela, assistant registrar, NMSU; and Vicente Vargas, Office of Government Relations, NMSU, discussed military and veterans' programs (MVPs) at NMSU. Their presentation was outlined in a PowerPoint document that was presented to the committee. They told the committee that the MVPs at the main NMSU campus in Las Cruces are under the Registrar's Office in the Student Affairs and Enrollment Management Division. There are certifying officials at each NMSU campus for veterans' education benefits and support for tuition assistance for veterans centralized at the main campus. They discussed the system-wide numbers the MVPs served for 2012 and the fees paid to NMSU through military benefits. They discussed the MVPs' collaboration with faculty, staff and external stakeholders and outlined the portals available to veterans and members of the military to assist with their benefits, including the VAOnce program; GoArmy Ed, for the Army, reservists and National Guard; the AI Portal for the Air Force; and MyCAA for members of the Navy and their dependents. They also discussed on-campus support for members of the military and veterans and outreach conducted to the community, including membership in the Greater

Las Cruces Chamber of Commerce Military Affairs Committee; board membership in the Honor Flight of Southern New Mexico, which sends World War II and Korean War veterans to the memorials in Washington, D.C., yearly; and outreach to White Sands Missile Range, Holloman Air Force Base and Fort Bliss. They informed the committee that Mr. Varela had recently attended a Department of Defense Worldwide Symposium for Higher Education; that NMSU attends the yearly meeting of the Western Association of Veterans Education Specialists Conference; and that NMSU is a member of the National Association of Veteran's Program Administrators. NMSU has been designated a military-friendly institution by both GI Jobs and Military Advanced Education for the last three years in a row. Going forward, NMSU is considering making military members and veterans eligible for preferential course registration; will implement plans to make earlier connections with service members and their families during the admission process; is negotiating a new memorandum of understanding (MOU) with Fort Bliss to allow recruitment and outreach on post; and is constructing a mentoring program for veteran students and a service member-specific new student orientation. The panel concluded its presentation by mentioning barriers to admission for service members, including prior balances owed to other colleges and difficulties in transitioning to an academic environment, particularly for combat veterans. The panel also discussed that reservists do not receive in-state tuition, which may occasion an amendment to the state statute on in-state tuition for members of the military.

Members of the committee inquired further about rural outreach, the conversion of military training to academic credit and how NMSU addresses posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Members of the committee noted that it was believed that recent legislation defining who is a member of the military should solve the issue of reservists not being eligible for in-state tuition; MVAC staff was directed to research the matter.

VetSuccess on Campus — Central New Mexico Community College (CNM)

Gwen Nutter, M.R.C., C.R.C., VetSuccess on Campus counselor, CNM Disability Resource Center; and Kathy Nelsen, M.Ed., L.P.C.C., vocational, rehabilitation and employment officer, Albuquerque Veteran Affairs Regional Office, spoke to the committee about the VetSuccess program at CNM and the Albuquerque campus of the University of New Mexico (UNM). Their presentation was outlined in a PowerPoint document that was presented to the committee. Ms. Nutter noted that CNM and UNM had been selected for two slots in the VetSuccess on Campus program, a program to assist veterans to transition to college life and to successfully complete their education programs. The program started at the two campuses in May. CNM was selected for the program because of its large enrollment of veterans, its proximity to a Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Regional Office and Medical Center, the provision of space and furniture for the program and CNM's collaborations with other veteran support services on campus. Ms. Nutter noted that in the fall of 2012, there were 1,225 CNM students using veterans' benefits. Ms. Nutter discussed the various facets of her role, including working with veterans to obtain their proper benefits and other student assistance; handling walk-in requests from veterans; making referrals for employment, medical care or other assistance; providing vocational and readjustment counseling; and networking with veterans' assistance organizations in the community. The VetSuccess program will collaborate with CNM

staff and faculty to develop mechanisms for measuring veterans' graduation and retention rates. Ms. Nelsen discussed the special efforts that are being made in collaboration with the VA Hospital poly-trauma staff to assist veterans with PTSD and traumatic brain injury (TBI). Members of the committee expressed support for the efforts of the VetSuccess program and had suggestions for how the program might be extended across the state.

New Mexico National Guard Members Who Were Called up for the State Penitentiary Riot in 1980

Floyd J. Garcia, a member of the New Mexico National Guard who was called up to respond to the State Penitentiary Riot of 1980, and other individuals who were guardsmen who responded to the riot told the committee of their ongoing problems because of untreated PTSD. They presented a letter that will be sent to Governor Susana Martinez about their struggles and a memoir that Mr. Garcia has written about the incident. They also discussed the destruction of their records by the New Mexico National Guard.

Motion 2

Representative Alcon made a motion, seconded by Senator Ulibarri, that a letter be sent to Secretary Timothy L. Hale of the Veterans' Services Department enclosing a copy of the memoir, asking what benefits might be available to the guardsmen and inquiring about the destruction of records. The motion passed with all members present voting in favor.

Deputy Secretary Alan Martinez of the Veterans' Services Department noted that the guardsmen called up for the penitentiary riot were called up by the governor, not the president, which is why they did not qualify for benefits, though he said he felt it would be appropriate for the state to find a way, through the Risk Management Division of the General Services Department or another agency, to provide benefits to these guardsmen. Deputy Secretary Martinez also stated that a letter asking about the destruction of records should be directed to the Department of Military Affairs, as it is the custodian of those records; he further stated that he would be willing to contact the department about this issue. Finally, he discussed how the Veterans' Services Department handles original records when they are sent in by service members.

Veterans Resource Center at the UNM: Focusing on Academic Success and Employment Preparation

Marilyn M. Dykman, L.C.D.R., U.S.C.G. (Ret.), director, Veterans Resource Center, UNM; Terry Babbitt, associate vice president for enrollment, UNM; and Alex Gonzalez, director, Registrar's Office, UNM, discussed how UNM addresses the needs of its students who are veterans. Their presentation was outlined in a PowerPoint document that was presented to the committee. They began their presentation by giving an overview of UNM's transitional services for veterans. They then discussed how military service training can be transferred to academic credit at UNM. They gave an overview of the various types of education benefits used by veterans or their spouses or dependents at UNM, and they discussed the dedicated staff and resources being offered to veterans for the upcoming spring 2013 registration. They stressed how the transition from active duty military service to an academic setting can be difficult for

these students, with many needing assistance in basic education skills such as mathematics, reading and writing; it can take one to two years for a veteran to adjust to the vastly different environment of an educational program. A further challenge for many veteran students arises from having experienced trauma while in service, especially for those who suffer from TBI or PTSD. They told the committee that UNM is fully networked into veterans' services throughout the state, including by agreeing to MOUs with the Veterans' Services Department, the Workforce Solutions Department and CNM. There is also a consortium agreement with CNM to ensure that credits can easily transfer from CNM to UNM. Additionally, a veteran employment representative and a representative from Disabled Veterans of America are on site weekly. They gave an overview of the rapid growth in the UNM Veterans Resource Center from 2009 to the present, driven by the 88 percent increase in veteran students at the university. They briefly discussed UNM's VetSuccess on Campus program and how the university is implementing Presidential Executive Order 13607, "Principles of Excellence for Educational Institutions Serving Service Members, Spouses, and Other Family Members". The university has a pilot program called Operation College Promise, backed by the Pat Tillman Foundation, that is collecting data on and tracking the progress of a randomly selected cohort of 50 veteran students. They also gave an overview of the Boots to Books, the Supportive Education for Returning Veterans and the Boots to Suits programs, all intended to help veterans complete their college education and enter the work force. They mentioned that UNM is launching a survey to see what particular issues veterans might have while attending UNM and to better assess veterans' needs. They told the committee that there is a need for more resources to fully implement all of these programs and plans, and they expressed the desire for the UNM Veterans Resource Center model to be used at colleges throughout the state. They finished their presentation by showing photographs of their new office space and showing the committee the special certificate and commemorative coin that are presented to veteran students upon graduation.

Members of the committee asked for further elucidation of UNM's support programs for veterans, funding needs and outreach efforts to veterans.

State Approving Agencies

Brandon Trujillo, director, New Mexico State Approving Agency (SAA), gave an overview of the functions of the SAA. The SAA approves schools and on-the-job training programs to ensure that they meet federal requirements for programs that utilize VA education benefits. He noted that the SAA has recently moved back under the authority of the Veterans' Services Department after two years under the Higher Education Department. The SAA's core functions are to approve programs for veterans' benefits; track compliance with federal requirements for programs; provide technical assistance for schools and training centers; act as a liaison with other government entities, such as the Regulation and Licensing Department or the Workforce Solutions Department; monitor compliance with contracts established with schools and training institutes; and conduct outreach regarding veterans' education benefits. Concerns include the antiquated nature of VA technical systems, which often prevents timely transfer of records when a veteran moves from one administrative region to another; the duplicative nature of many compliance reports; failure of schools to keep updated and accurate records of enrollment changes, which could result in a veteran being liable to unexpectedly repay benefits;

and the burdens placed on requiring SAAs to be compliance experts when they were originally intended to be liaisons. Mr. Trujillo requested that a letter be sent to New Mexico's congressional delegation asking that if federal legislation on veteran education is considered, the members of the delegation consult with the SAA; that a joint memorial be introduced in the upcoming legislative session recognizing the work done by the SAA; and that schools be recognized as veteran serving institutes of higher education.

Motion 3

Senator Ulibarri made a motion, seconded by Representative Hamilton, that the letter requested by Mr. Trujillo be drafted. The motion passed with all members present voting in favor.

Mr. Trujillo was also directed to work with MVAC staff on the language of the memorial he requested for consideration at the November committee meeting.

Motion 4

Senator Ulibarri made a motion, seconded by Representative Alcon, to approve the minutes of the August 2012 meeting of the committee. The motion passed with all members present voting in favor.

Veteran Scholarship Program

Deputy Secretary Martinez gave a presentation to the committee on the enabling legislation necessary to implement the constitutional amendment on a combat veterans scholarship adopted by the voters of the state in the November 2010 general election. His presentation was outlined in a PowerPoint document that was presented to the committee. He gave an overview of the numbers of combat veterans in the state, discussed the passage of the constitutional amendment and discussed the impacts such legislation would have. The scholarships would assist veterans in finishing their degrees and thus facilitate their integration into the work force while having a minimal immediate fiscal impact. The Veterans' Services Department and the Higher Education Department estimate an initial budgetary allocation of between \$150,000 and \$200,000. In response to questions from members of the committee, Deputy Secretary Martinez discussed how the enabling legislation for the amendment became bogged down in the legislative process. Members of the committee suggested that Deputy Secretary Martinez work with MVAC staff to bring a draft of the enabling legislation to the November committee meeting for possible endorsement by the committee.

Update on the State's Namesake Nuclear Submarine, USS *New Mexico* (SSN-779)

Dick Brown, chair, USS *New Mexico* Committee, Navy League of the United States, informed the committee about the activities surrounding the state's namesake nuclear submarine. His presentation was outlined in a PowerPoint document that was presented to the committee. He gave some background on the history of the naming of the submarine and discussed the activities of the USS *New Mexico* Committee. He asked for legislative support for a \$25,000 appropriation to support the USS *New Mexico* Committee's work and detailed how the \$25,000 would be spent. He noted that the \$25,000 had been included in the budget in the last legislative session, but it was line-item vetoed by the governor. Members of the committee suggested that the committee should consider endorsing a new appropriation at the November committee meeting, and that the Office of the Governor be informed that the appropriation would be coming to her desk.

Adjournment

There being no further business before the committee, the committee adjourned at 3:28 p.m.